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Land of the Heroes

Conclusion

By John T. Dizer



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Other New Jersey heroes include "Tom Slade," "Roy Blakeley" and "Pee-wee Harris," (Fitzhugh) all of Bridgeboro, New Jersey. They spent their summers at Temple Camp in the Catskills of New York and presumably both states could claim credit for their development.

Hancock's heroes all appear to be Easterners and several definitely come from New Jersey. In "Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks," "The place was one of the smaller cities in New Jersey." (p. 9.) It was apparently in northern Jersey since it didn't take the boys very long to go from it to New York City to enlist.

Royce Osborn, hero of "The Aeroplane Express," one of "The Aeroplane Boys" Series (Lamar) was the son of "George M. Osborne, the highest paid mechanic in Newark . . ." (p. 22.)

Many heroes come from the New England States. Massachusetts and Maine in particular are overrun with them with the overflow in Connecticut. This writer has always concurred with the tradition, "In New Hampshire they raise rocks, in Vermont they raise men," but in keeping with the strict veracity of this paper it must be admitted that not too many heroes seem to come from either of these states.

There are a few exceptions. Ephraim Gallup, chum of Frank Merriwell, is a good Vermonter but is awkward, ungainly and uncouth and is not the typical hero.

In "The Young Acrobat" (Alger) Achilles Henderson, the great Scotch giant in the circus was from Vermont. "It's a good deal easier than working

on a farm, especially in Vermont, where I was born and bred." (p. 11.)

C. A. Stephens describes in "A Busy Year At The Old Squires," the boys' encounter with the Wild Man of Borneo in a travelling show.

"Why, . . . aren't you from the wilds of Borneo? . . ."

"Thunder, no!" the Wild Man replied confidentially. "I don't even know where it is. I'm from over in Vermont—Bellows Falls." What some people won't do to get out of Vermont.

"Four in Camp," subtitled A Story of Summer Adventures in the New Hampshire Woods, (Barbour) concerns New Hampshire but the heroes, as noted earlier, are all from other states.

The "Woodranger Tales" of Browne feature New Hampshire heroes, but, in "The Hero of the Hills," as an example, which takes place about 1750, the action is considerably earlier than in the better known series books.

We should mention the "Phillips Exeter" series by Dudley in any discussion of New Hampshire, but most prep schools seem to be in other states.

Maine can boast of innumerable heroes "Rex Kingdon of Ridgewood High" (Braddock) is an example. Ridgewood lies near the Canadian border and from the references to the ocean, potatoes and Portland is without question in Maine though it must be admitted that Rex Kingdon came from Boston. (p. 51.)

The "Ranger Boys" (LaBelle) come from Southern Maine. "The three boys live in a small Maine town, only a few miles from Portland . . ." ("The Ranger Boys Outwit The Timber Thieves," p. 7.)

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Rockspur Academy, scene of Pat-ten's "Rockspur Nine, "Rockspur Eleven," etc. is also in Maine.

The "Submarine Boys" (Durham) are coastal Yankees. "Jack Benson . . paid for his keep . . by working . . in his native seaport town of Oakport." ("The Submarine Boys on Duty," p. 14.) Jack and Hal Hastings worked their way into the Dunhaven boatyard, also on the coast, and speedily became proficient at submarine manipulation, Jack at age 16 becoming captain and Hal engineer of the Submarine Pollard as well as instructors to Annapolis cadets. Franklin Mathiews, chief librarian of the Boy Scouts, was highly incensed at this, considering it somewhat improbable. Knowing the sterling worth of coastal yankees as we do we can realize that his doubts were unfounded. Descriptions of the weather and general surroundings lead us to suspect a Maine locale. It took five days of steaming to get from Dunhaven to Annapolis which also points to Maine, although it does not rule out Massachusetts, Connecticut or Rhode Island.

The "Motor Boat Club Boys" (Hancock) had a Maine base. Captain Tom Halstead came from the "pretty little Kennebec village of Bayport." ("The Motor Boat Club of the Kennebec," p. 8.)

The "Golden Boys" Wyman came from Skowhegan, Maine.

Oliver Optic's heroes occasionally came from Maine. "Little Bobtail" takes place in Camden.

The "Old Squire" series of C. A. Stephens, mentioned previously, have a Maine locale. These are just a few examples of Mainiac heroes.

Frank Nelson, hero of "Frank, The Young Naturalist," "Frank on the Prairie," etc., etc. (Castlemon) traveled all over the country being heroic but had his origins in Boston and spent some years in Lawrence, Maine, "About one hundred miles north of Augusta." ("Frank, The Young Naturalist," p. 11.)

The "Motor Boys" (Young) are Massachusetts products. "Cresville was a pleasant town, not a great many miles

from Boston." ("The Motor Boys," p. 1.)

Paul Graham, "The Young Bandmaster" (Bonehill) had lived in Boston. "At that time . . had lived in the fashionable portion of the town, near the Back Bay . . ." ("The Young Bandmaster," p. 11.)

Jack Chadwick and his cousin Tom Jesson, famous Boy Inventors, lived "at Mr. Chadwick's handsome home on the outskirts of Boston." ("The Boy Inventors' Wireless Triumph," p. 11.)

Paul Duncan of "Little by Little" (Optic) came from Bayville which " . . is situated about seven or eight miles from Boston . . ." Jack Somers, hero of Optic's "The Army and Navy Stories" came from Pinchbrook, not far from Boston. In Optic's "The Boat Club" we find, "Rippleton, the scene of my story, is a New England village situated about ten miles from Boston."

Crofton Academy may well be in Massachusetts. In "Crofton Chums" (Barbour) we read, "Gil's home was in Providence, Rhode Island, and Poke's in New York City. The latter had taken an early train and Gil had joined him at Providence and the two had reached . . Crofton well before noon." ("Crofton Chums," p. 10.)

It is often difficult to distinguish between Massachusetts and Connecticut Academies. Both have a common standard of excellence. "Fardale nestled among the hills which here reached down to the very seacoast." ("Frank Merriwell's School Days," p. 12.) Fardale Academy of which Frank Merriwell was the most famous alumnus, was probably in Connecticut. Merriwell ended up at Yale and all the evidence points to a Connecticut location.

Oakdale Academy, home of Ben Stone, was also in New England.

In describing life at Nostrand School Barbour says, " . . September, . . can be extremely warm in New England . . ." ("Tod Hale With The Crew," p. 2.)

Frank Armstrong was definitely from Connecticut. "You're a credit to the good old nutmeg state of Connecticut," we read in "Frank Armstrong's Vacation" (p. 308.) His

school, Queens, is apparently another fine old Connecticut school.

We can find general references to New England backgrounds in rather unlikely places. Chester Crawford, one of the world-famous "Boy Allies" (Drake) came from New England. "His father was a well-to-do physician in a small New England town." ("Boy Allies on the North Sea Patrol" p. 6.)

All admirers of Ted Scott, (Dixon), first man to fly solo non-stop across the Atlantic know that he was raised in Bromville, "... a thriving town ... in the Middle West on the Rappick River ..." ("Over The Ocean To Paris," p. 3). It is possibly most significant, however, to find that as a small child "... he had been brought from New England to Bromville ..." and apparently had a New England background. ("Through the Air to Alaska," p. 14.)

The above examples are a random sample of representative boy heroes. Most apparently came from the northeastern part of the country. It is freely admitted that we can find many boy heroes who came from other areas, as we have already shown, but as a percent of the total the number is rather small. A few of the better known ones are:

The land-locked "Boy Allies," (Hayes), Hal Paine and Chester Crawford, who were raised in Illinois.

Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott and Company (Edwards) who came from Tuttle, Illinois.

Mark Tidd, (Kelland), who lived in Wicksville, Michigan.

The Boy Scouts (Fletcher) who lived in an "Indiana town named Beverly." ("Boy Scouts Test of Courage," p. 8.) In other series we find Boy Scouts scattered all over the country.

The "River Motor-Boat Boys" (Gordon) "had been reared in the streets of the city ..." (Chicago). ("The River Motor-Boat Boys On The Amazon," p. 10.)

At this point in our research it might be helpful to take a map of the United States and stick pins wherever a hero from our random sample was born or grew up. The first thing

we note is a map full of pins. The next thing, as we suspected, is a preponderance of pins in the northeastern part of the country. A regression analysis of our data informs us that this observation is statistically significant and that there are more heroes born in the Northeast than in any other part of the country. Having carefully and objectively determined this point we can proceed to our next concern, namely, why are heroes more prevalent in the Northeast? More specifically, is it possible to draw any inferences as to genetic backgrounds, climatic conditions or social environment with respect to the development of heroes.

The obvious suggestion is that heroes are born in the Northeast because the recorders of their heroism, or their publishers, or their audience, lived in the Northeast. This suggestion we utterly reject. We admit that the literary virtuosity of Hayes, Garis, Patten, Stratemeyer, Hancock et al may have been induced or at least affected by the same influences that produced Dick Prescott, Ben Boltwood, Frank Chadwick and Tom Swift. More than this we will not admit. The particular influences are possibly not susceptible to scholarly delineation or statistical verification, but in such a pioneering study as this it is proper to project hypotheses and leave others to provide additional data which will either substantiate or refute them.

An interesting consideration and perhaps a pertinent one is the effect of geographical location on physical development but it is first necessary to examine the physical appearance of representative heroes and to determine if there is a dominant pattern which deviates from the population as a whole. Fortunately we have many descriptions available.

We note this description of Frank Chadwick, the sea-going Boy Ally from Boston: "Always athletically inclined, he was extremely large for his age; and his muscles, hardened by much outdoor exercise, made him a match for many a man twice his age ..." "... was an expert in the art of self-defense. Also he could ride, shoot and fence." On the other hand, Hal Paine

and Chester Crawford, the land-locked Boy Allies from Illinois, had developed their athletic propensities in "one of the lumber camps owned by Chester's father, in the great Northwest." Ben Boltwood was a "clean-limbed, square-shouldered young fellow . . ." Jack Benson of Submarine Boys fame, "from much practice in boxing, was as agile and slippery as a monkey and an eel combined." Dick Hamilton "was a boy a little above the average height, well built, with curling brown hair and eyes of the same hue." Don Sturdy was "a tall, muscular boy . . ." A description of Frank Marriwell states, "His face was frank, open and willing . . . and the set of his jaw told that he could be firm and dauntless." "Frank (Merrick) was dark, curly-haired, of medium height and slim, but strong and wiry. Bob (Temple) was fair and sleepy-eyed, a fraction under six feet tall and weighed 180 pounds." ("Radio Boys"—Breckenbridge) "Bob (Layton) . . . was of rather dark complexion, and was tall and well-developed for his age. He was vigorous and athletic and a lover of outdoor sports. His magnetism and vitality made him a "live wire," and he was the natural leader among the boys with whom he associated. His nature was frank and friendly." ("Radio Boys"—Chapman). We could continue indefinitely. In general our heroes seem to be vigorous and upstanding but not possessed of any abnormal physical superiority. The Boy Allies appear to be the exceptions. This is perhaps fortunate when we consider the vicissitudes to which they were exposed during World War I.

In contrast to this we occasionally find a featured hero who is definitely not athletic, clean-cut, frank and friendly. Tom Slade is an example. "He was about fifteen and of a heavy, ungraceful build. His hair was thick and rather scraggly, his face was of the square type, and his expression what people call stolid. He had freckles but not too many, and his mouth was large and his lips tight-set." Walter Harris, otherwise known as "Pee-wee," was so diminutive as to be a pocket edition of a Boy Scout. Mark

Tidd "was the fattest boy I ever saw, or ever expect to see, and the funniest looking. His head was round and 'most as big as a pretty good-sized pumpkin, and his cheeks were so fat they almost covered up his eyes." We must remember that Mark came from Michigan and this appearance may be common there. To complicate the analysis we often find that the Boy Chums, Rangers, Inventors, Scouts, etc. include an assortment of physical types including quite generally one chubby but good-natured and jolly boy, one small and enthusiastic member of the gang and often one former protagonist of the featured hero, together with the hero himself who stands out because of his natural ability, aggressiveness and leadership, but not necessarily for brute strength.

Summing up the question of physical considerations we can say that there is no dominant pattern among heroes and also that the characteristics of their followers vary as much as the population at large. This would seem to indicate both that physical development itself is not of major importance and that a Northeastern geographical location is not significant in the physical development of heroes.

Social and economic environments also do not appear significant although the detailed arguments are too long for this paper. Suffice it to say that Northeastern heroes range from impoverished newsboys in New York City and such penniless farm boys as Dave Dashaway the aviator and Blake Stewart the Moving Picture Boy to recognized millionaires such as Dick Hamilton. Many of the boys have sufficient income to do considerable traveling, exploring and inventing as well as to pay their expenses at the Academies and Prep Schools which flourish in the Northeast. It may be significant that they generally seem to be natural gentlemen with good diction and manners, regardless of their backgrounds.

In the current anti-Waspish climate dare we suggest the white Anglo-Saxon backgrounds of our heroes as a basis for their achievements? This background can be accepted without

proof by an examination of some of the names already mentioned. Prescott, Grant, Swift, Dashaway, Rover, Merriwell, Bradley, Stewart, Sturdy, Hamilton, Hardy, Osborn, Blakeley are about as English as you can get. Not a Slav, German or Italian, perish the thought, in the lot. We can prove easily and definitely, however, that the ethnic background is not responsible for heroism, simply by noting that almost all of the villains are good old Wasps also. Tom Swift had his Andy Fogger, Dick Rover had Dan Baxter and nobody could stand Josiah Crabtree. It seems clear that Wasps are featured as heroes and villains simply because Wasps settled the Northeast and are prominent in that area.

A suggestion raised by some authors is that boys become heroes by trying to live up to their names. This is supposed to account for the success of the Dashaways, Swifts, Rovers, Sturdies and Hardies. Their success seems to be neither more nor less than heroes with less distinguished names and this argument needs more documentation.

What observations can we now make to throw light on why heroes come from the Northeast? A careful re-examination of our data points out a most significant fact. As we noted above, each hero has his villain and not only do more heroes come from the Northeast but so also do more villains. And the villainy of the villains is as deep-dyed as the virtue of the heroes. Leslie Gage was as worthy a protagonist for Frank Merriwell as was Gus Plum for Dave Porter. We have already mentioned Fogger and Baxter. As we examine our villains we find that they are generally not as prepossessing in appearance and definitely not as frank and friendly as our heroes but are of about equal or even superior physical development. We question, then, what factors do help them succeed in their villainy. We note that they have a vigor, vitality and aggressiveness which may lead to success in any endeavor and that these characteristics are similar to those noted in our heroes. We may not care to admit it, but a boy of

grit, courage, determination and vigor can be either a successful villain or hero, depending on his interests and inclinations. So we have apparently isolated basic characteristics of vigor, vitality and determination in both heroes and villains from the Northeast. And with this information we can present a tenable hypothesis as to why so many heroes come from the Northeast. It is the climate of the Northeast which is as variable as the backgrounds and abilities of both our heroes and our villains which is responsible for developing these qualities. It is the variation in temperature and climatic conditions and the tremendous range of weather experiences that both force the development of heroes and villains and provide opportunities for development.

It takes courage, grit, determination and all the vigor and vitality possible to survive a Northeast winter. No wonder Tom Swift developed the determination to push on with his advanced research in the fields of electronics and aeronautics. He got the practice just in trying to get through the winter. Besides, there wasn't much else he could do anyway in a central New York winter and it kept his mind off the weather. No wonder Don Sturdy headed for the Desert of Mystery, Lion Land and the Head Hunters. Anything to get away from the winter. Anyone who has spent his formative years battling the bleak, inhospitable, punishing winters of the Northeast has to develop determination and vigor or perish.

It seems equally true that while winters develop vigor and determination, summers offer all sorts of opportunities to be heroic. There are lakes by the dozens for canoeing, boating trips or swimming races. There are forests and mountains, caves and islands for sleuthing out ancient mysteries and rescuing miscellaneous damsels from assorted situations. There are simply more heroic things to do in the Northeast. If Rex Kingdon wants to go to the north woods the woods are available. If Tom Swift wants to take a weeks cruise in his motor boat, Lake Carlopa is waiting. In the other sec-

tions of the country this is not true. There are not as many lakes and woods and mountains to help a boy learn the hero's trade and there is not the weather to force him to become vigorous, aggressive and active. So the hypothesis can be stated in two parts, one, that heroes come from the Northeast because there are more opportunities to practice heroism; second, that the weather is such that the boys have to become heroes to survive.

NEWS NOTES

By Charles Bragin

The beautiful building of the Hallmark Cards Gallery at 720 Fifth Ave. now has a nice dime novel exhibit from Charles Bragin—will be there thru July 14th.

Tip Tops. Your readers I am sure will enjoy the short story—incidentally the producer, Skip Redwine — who sunk \$100,000.00 in the venture, invited me to be his guest at the opening, to meet the cast, etc.

I begged off, giving my usual excuse that my race track interests kept me out of the city.

I have had other invitations of that kind from producers, and know well the reason—they figure I might be an "angel," with big and ready money to back their shows.

I am not having anything of that, so I keep away—but I am well acquainted with stage people, from WEBER & FIELDS (who had offices in same building with me) to burlesque people and others.

Have a very high regard for them, incidently the best stories of stage people in dime novels were those in the Comic Library written by George Small, who knew them personally and intimately and lived with them.

The best, of course, were the Shorty stories—in fact, they are the best "stage people" of any writer in or out of dime novels.

Back numbers, Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup Nos. 1 to 237 inclusive. A number of reprints in the lower numbers (can't be helped). Also two indexes, novel catalogue, birthday number and the one number published of Pioneer and Scouts of the Old West. Single issues, 10c each.

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S STAGE SETBACK

By Frank C. Acker

Longtime Merriwell readers may recall the minimal advertising and poor sales rung up by "Mr. Frank Merriwell," published 1941, which portrayed Frank in vigorous middle age some months prior to our entry into World War II. Asserting that the publishers—then pushing another book, "Out of the Night"—failed to give adequate publicity and support to his novel, the late Gilbert Patten, Merriwell's creator, was bitterly disappointed and vowed never to write another Merriwell story for publication. And "Mr. Frank Merriwell" did in fact prove to be his last.

Now, once more, but without the personal touch of Patten, Frank has come on stage, this time as a turn-of-the-century college man in a Broadway musical, "Frank Merriwell or Honor Challenged." Unhappily, like the book, the musical has failed.

"Frank Merriwell Gets Defeated By Broadway!" was the lead used by Douglas Watt (N. Y. Daily News, Monday April 26, 1971) in his review of the opening night performance which was also the musical's farewell. Immediately after its formal opening the show closed. Before asking why, let's look at the play itself.

The weekly entertainment review VARIETY of Wednesday April 28, 1971 lists the cast and related details in part as follows:

FRANK MERRIWELL

Sandy Farber and Stanley Barnett, in association with Nate Friedman, presentation of a musical comedy in two acts (12 scenes, 18 numbers) with book by Skip Redwine, Larry Frank and Heywood Gould, and music and lyrics by Redwine and Frank, based on the stories by Burt L. Standish (Gilbert Patten) . . . Opened April 24, '71 at the Longacre Theatre, N. Y.; \$5 top.

Frank Merriwell	-----	Larry Ellis
Inza Burrage	-----	Linda Donovan
Bart Hodge	-----	Peter Shawn
Ted Jones	----	Garry Keith
Prof. Burrage	--	Thomas Ruisanger
Mrs. Snodd	-----	Liz Sheridan

Manuel	-----	Bill Hinnant
Belinda Belle Snodd	----	Neva Small
Schoolboys	-----	J. J. Jepson
		Larry Ross, Walter Bobbie
Girls	-----	Lori Cesar
		Ellie Smith, Jennifer Williams

Musical numbers:

There's No School Like Our School
 Howdy, Mr. Sunshine
 Prim and Proper
 Inza
 Look for the Happiness Ahead
 I'd Be Crazy to be Crazy Over You
 Now It's Fall
 The Fallin' Out of Love Rag
 Frank, Frank, Frank
 In Real Life
 The Broadway of My Heart
 Winter's Here
 The Pure in Heart
 I Must Be Crazy (reprise)
 Don't Turn His Picture to the Wall
 Manuel Your Friend
 The Pure in Heart (reprise)
 Look for the Happiness Ahead (reprise)

The musical, said by co-producer Farber to be four years in preparation, takes place in 1897 and deals with the exploits of the legendary Frank Merriwell. "That Was a Cowardly Blow," taken from the first story of the Merriwell saga, triggers the opening. Some of the other scenes are:

Death at the Picnic
 Explosion in Tunnel G
 Terror at the Junction
 Into the Enemy's Hands
 Frank Is Missing

As the story opens, Frank is coming by train to Fardale College (not Yale, not Fardale Academy). There he quickly falls in love with Inza, daughter of the lovable chemistry professor who has devised a bomb that will blow up the world. Manuel, Spanish agent, is determined to steal the bomb since the Spanish-American War looms on the horizon.

In the Merriwell tradition, Frank triumphs in sports, defeats the spies and saves Inza from dread accident or death time and again. But the odds are horrendous. He is framed, betray-

ed and repeatedly threatened with dire fate. Unfortunately for the audience, all of Frank's exploits take place off-stage, except for one in which at the end, he swings by his hands across cracking timbers in an abandoned mine to rescue Inza from imminent, dastardly explosion. With the single exception of this exploit it is only through songs, squeals and shouted comments of the six-chorus on stage that the onlookers "see" Merriwell's other feats of dering-do, which are presumably taking place backstage.

In the very first chorus number, while Fardale College students await Merriwell's arrival at the train station, the three chorus girls march in with picket signs accusing Fardale of being "Unfair To Women." Walter Kerr commented in his N. Y. Times review, Sunday May 9, "With this invasion of Women's Lib into a spoof of turn-of-the-century didoes, you know that the authors had already lost their heads."

Be that as it may, the impact of poor attendance at pre-opening performances was reenforced by critics' reactions. VARIETY of April 28 reported that of press reviews four were unfavorable, one favorable; and of broadcast reviews six were unfavorable, two favorable.

A roundup of critics' commentary follows:

1. The stage production is well intentioned and earnest, but not good enough. (VARIETY, April 28)
2. None of it is believable and even the songs and unpretentious dance numbers fail to generate excitement. (Same reference)
3. FRANK MERRIWELL is like a college show . . . mildly interesting, mildly amusing, and of negligible consequence. The idea is evidently to capitalize on the supposed current preoccupation with nostalgia, but the attempt seems too little and too late to repeat the success of "No, No, Nanette," to cite the most obvious case. The show seems merely antiquated. (Same reference)
4. If a musical celebrating a past

that is itself a fiction is to succeed at all, it must be groomed on verisimilitude; we should have had on the stage of the Longacre a saturation of authentic turn-of-the-century Yale matter, most of which was surely accessible to the authors of the play and capable of being translated into musical terms. ("The Theatre" by Brendan Gill in New Yorker, late April)

5. The book (i.e. the story) is not even camp, just clumsy juvenilia. The Redwine-Frank songs are even sillier. (N. Y. Daily News, April 26)
6. It was a very bad musical. You knew it was going to be in the first two minutes. (The show did have a good villain in Bill Hinant, erstwhile Snoopy of "You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown") . . . The evening was without wit or period feeling or panache and it effectively disposed of the current notion that nostalgia works automatically, without help from men of talent and taste. (N. Y. Times, Sunday May 9 (Arts and Leisure) "Tonight We Open, Tonight We Close" by Walter Kerr)
7. This new Frank Merriwell is trying humorously to evoke a purely literary form and needs for success nothing but that total sincerity that the authors of the musical deny it. The musical is trying to make fun of something that, if it exists at all, is no laughing matter. Frank's (exploits) need to be taken seriously if at all. And he cannot be taken seriously . . . The scenery by Tom John is unimaginative and tasteless — it is difficult to see how much less of a period might have been evoked. (N. Y. Times, April 26, "Stage: Musical Resuscitation of 'Frank Merriwell'" by Clive Barnes)
8. No one seemed to know whether he was involved in a Frank Merriwell story for real or whether he was doing a spoof on one . . . Whether to laugh with it or at it was at all times the main question. As I recall, I didn't laugh at all.

("CUE," May 8, The Theatre by Lawrence Wunderlich)

Add to this devastating criticism the dismal box office for the approximately two weeks of preview (about \$8,100 income per week against break-even figure of \$18,000) and one sees the inevitability of the closing.

But this does not explain why. Why was Frank Merriwell a mini-musical with a cast of only fourteen, a chorus of but six, without stars or even feature performers? Why were only nine musicians in the pit doubling on a variety of instruments, about seven less than required minimum for the standard Broadway musical? Why were scenery and costumes the simplest possible? Why were the songs not memorable? Why, in short, was top talent not brought to bear across the board?

As with Patten's Mr. Frank Merriwell, the answer lies in one word — money, the strictly limited support by the producers. For the musical at least this was well intentioned and innovative. FRANK MERRIWELL was the first Broadway production to be mounted under what is called the "limited gross contract."

This contract, an optional alternative for the standard Broadway production agreement covering financial and working conditions, was unveiled last January by the League of N. Y. Theatres, the organization of Broadway producers and theatre operators. The pact resulted from more than a year of intensive bargaining by the League, five theatrical trade unions and the Dramatists Guild. Essentially this production agreement turns on the lowering of union scales coupled with the self-imposed lowering of the box office gross by producers, thus reducing the show's money making potential but allowing production for as low as one fifth standard costs.

For FRANK MERRIWELL this worked out as follows. The 14 actors worked weekly for scale (\$164.50), the members of the other unions at about 25% below scale (\$200). The director-choreographer got \$2,500 weekly, about half the standard Broadway contract. Top ticket price was set at \$5 in contrast to the usual \$12.50 to \$15

range, and weekly maximum possible gross was limited to \$25,000. This was done by roping off balcony seats so that only some 830 seats were available. By these and other economies the musical was brought on stage for an investment of approximately \$100,000 whereas a traditional musical would probably have cost about a half million.

So in retrospect the first Broadway production under the limited gross agreement may be said to have "worked" in the technical sense that it was brought to the stage on a relatively small investment. But in the larger sense, of course, it failed. Inevitably legitimate producers will now take a careful look at this new technique as a viable means of putting on first class shows with hit possibilities. Clearly Frank Merriwell's "Defeat on Broadway" has raised serious doubts as to whether this theatrical creation somewhere between Off-Broadway and full-scale Broadway is artistically and economically feasible. One lesson—not new—has come through loud and clear. If a show is good, it doesn't matter that tickets cost up to \$15. People will come. But if it isn't good, they will not come however modest the cost.

For those of us who are Merriwell buffs, "Frank Merriwell or Honor Challenged" is a melancholy episode in the chronology of Patten's legendary hero. But it is not the final episode. The legend lives on. We know that generations to come will need and inevitably will develop their "modern" adaptations of the Merriwell character and qualities that inspired three decades of American youth. In the best times, in the worst times man needs a hero.

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